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ABSTRACT

Two experiments investigated the role of ego-involvement in perceived media effects. Subjects, 34 pro-Israeli, 34 pro-Palestinian, and 34 neutral college students, viewed a specially constructed videotape of footage of the 1982 war between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) that portrayed both sides equally as aggressors and victims. Participants, who were not told the real purpose of the study, were then asked questions designed to elicit their personal opinions of the tape. In the second experiment, 24 communications students viewed the videotape on the Middle East war, while 24 others assigned to a control group watched an excerpt from a PBS program on political advertising. The groups were then surveyed about attitudes toward Arabs and Jews. Results of the first study indicated that ego-involvement exerts strong and pervasive effects on perceived media effects. Ego-involved partisans believed that neutral persons would see their side as the aggressor and their antagonists as the victim, and that viewers would feel more positive toward the out-group's ethnic identity. Partisans even believed that viewers would recall facts casting their side as the aggressor and their antagonists as the victim. In contrast to these perceptions, the second experiment demonstrated that news coverage did not change attitudes toward Israel or the PLO, and that viewers primarily remembered random incidents of violence and inhumanity--incidents that they did not associate with either Israel or the PLO. (Tables of data and references are appended.) (NKA)

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PARTISANS AND THE PRESS:
PERCEPTIONS OF THIRD PERSONS AND THIRD PERSON EFFECTS OF NEWS COVERAGE OF THE MIDDLE EAST

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Public opinion scholars have long observed that citizens in a democracy, far removed from the center of political decision making, must rely on their perceptions of the political environment in order to actively participate in public discussions. In contemporary society, mass media are generally believed to play an important role in the formation of the public's perceptions and attitudes. Much of the classical research on public opinion and mass communication takes the media as the starting point and then seeks to demonstrate that mass media influence the public's awareness, perception or evaluation of an issue (Becker, McCombs and McLeod, 1975; McCombs, 1972). Yet in a provocative paper Davison (1983) adopted a dramatically different approach, arguing that media effects may not be primarily due to the actual reactions of the intended audience of the message, but, instead, to the actions of those "who anticipate, or think they perceive, some reaction on the part of others" (Davison, 1983, p. 3).

Davison invoked "the third person effect hypothesis" in order to explain this phenomenon. This hypothesis predicts that individuals will assume that communications will not have their greatest influence "on 'me' or 'you' but on 'them' -- the third persons" (Davison, 1983, p. 3). Several studies have now been conducted that examine this hypothesis, and all provide varying degrees of support for Davison's predictions. In his original article, Davison presents the results of several surveys testing various facets of his approach. Although the absence of statistical tests of significance makes it difficult to adequately assess the strength of the findings, the pattern of results clearly suggests that individuals expect

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that communications will exert a greater impact on others than on themselves. Glynn (1985) reported that, somewhat consistent with the hypothesis, survey respondents could distinguish between the impact public opinion exerted on others as opposed to themselves; however, contrary to the third person notion, individuals did not perceive that public opinion exerted a greater impact on others than on themselves. Thompson, Oshagan and Chaffee (1986) found that beliefs about the impact of pornography accounted for over 50 per cent of the variance in attitudes toward pornography, after controlling for key demographic, political and sexual attitude measures. In a more direct test of the third person hypothesis, Mutz (1987) examined perceptions of media influence and public opinion regarding divestment of financial investments in South Africa. Mutz found that survey respondents believed that media reports about this issue exerted a greater impact on others than on themselves. This discrepancy was greatest among respondents who regarded the South African as highly important. This study also found that perceptions of the distribution of public opinion were related to willingness to express opinions publicly--a key component of the spiral of silence theory.

These investigations have focused on the discrepancy between perceptions of communication effects on others and the self. Comparatively less attention has been focused on determining the conditions under which individuals are particularly inclined to expect that media will influence third persons. One important condition--suggested in Davison's paper and by social psychological research--is ego-involvement.

Davison notes that:

> One possible explanation for the fact that people on both sides of an issue can see the media as biased against their point of view is that each observer assumes a disproportionate effect will be achieved by arguments or facts supporting the "wrong" side of the issue. Others (the third persons,)the observer reasons, will be unduly impressed by these facts or arguments; they do not have the information that enables me to form a correct opinion (Davison, 1983, p. 11).

Thus, Davison suggests that ego-involved partisans will assume that media will sway third persons against their side. On the other hand, several lines of research make the opposite prediction--i.e., under high involvement individuals believe that media reports will enhance agreement with their point of view. The purpose of the present study is to report the results of two experiments that attempt to shed light on the role that ego-involvement plays in the perception of media effects on third persons.

Theoretical Underpinnings

The first theoretical prediction assumes that when people are personally involved in an issue, they will egocentrically project their own views onto the public. Fields and Schuman (1976) offer support for this view, although their study did not assess involvement directly. In a study of Detroit residents' perceptions of public beliefs about racial issues, Fields and Schuman reported that the vast majority of respondents believed that others would agree with their own position on racial integration. Respondents' perceptions of others' views turned out to be rather inaccurate, when compared to base-line statistical data. Fields and Schuman concluded that people project their own beliefs onto

the public--"a large proportion of people feel that the world they live in agrees with their own opinions on public issues...People appear to look into the world and somehow see their own opinion reflected back." (Fields and Schuman, 1976). When one considers that ego-involvement can accentuate and distort perceptions of social reality (Petty and Cacioppo, 1981), it is only reasonable to expect that the tendency to assume that others share one's own position will be magnified under high ego-involvement. When individuals are personally involved in media reports, they may egocentrically assume that members of the public will naturally share their point of view on the issue. Even when the media present information that conflicts with their position, ego-involved partisans may reason that "any normal person will realize that what the media are saying is ridiculous. After they think about it, people will come to their senses and recognize that our position is the only sensible way to proceed."

There is also a considerable body of research in social psychology that makes a similar prediction. Studies of social perception have documented that when individuals have a strong ego-involved commitment to a position, they tend to assimilate or find support in evidence and information that other people regard as ambiguous, inconclusive and problem-ridden.

Although examples of this "confirmatory bias" abound (cf. Chapman & Chapman, 1967; Nisbett & Ross, 1980), the study that is most frequently cited in this regard is Lord, Ross and Lepper's (1979) experiment involving supporters and opponents of capital punishment. After reading through a

set of empirical studies that yielded mixed and inconclusive findings on the effectiveness of the death penalty, both sides proceeded to find support in the evidence that corroborated their point of view, while they found fault with facts and information that was inconsistent with their position. Although the evidence was equivocal, partisans from both sides were quite able to find support in the few facts that substantiated their position on capital punishment. Applied to the perception of media effects, these findings suggest that ego-involved partisans should manage to view as consistent with their position even the most inconclusive and controversial media reports. One would therefore expect them to project this view onto third persons.

This seemingly logical approach flies in the fact of Davison's third person effect hypothesis and is inconsistent with what common observation suggests: when people are ego-involved in an issue, whether it is sports, politics, the law, or religion, they rarely conclude that media coverage supports their point of view on the issue. Instead, they charge that the reports are biased and prejudiced against their side.

Vallone, Ross and Lepper (1985) have provided experimental evidence in support of the hypothesis that ego-involvement leads individuals to perceive that controversial media reports are unfairly biased and hostile to their own position on the issue. They found that pro-Israeli partisans perceived that neutral viewers would become more negative to Israel after viewing media coverage of the 1982 Beirut massacre, while pro-Arab partisans believed that neutral viewers would become more positive

to Israel. As intriguing as these findings are, they are somewhat weakened by the tendency of control group subjects' perceptions to closely resemble those of pro-Israeli partisans.

On the average, pro-Arab subjects claimed that 37 per cent of neutral viewers would become more negative to Israel after watching the news coverage; pro-Israel subjects believed that 68 per cent of neutral viewers would become more negative to Israel, and the control group of nonpartisan subjects, far from being in the middle of the two groups, claimed that 65 per cent of neutral viewers would become more negative to Israel as well. And, while the investigators did find that control group subjects were less likely to resemble Israeli partisans the more knowledge that they had about the conflict, the aforementioned findings with their original subject population raise the possibility that the pro-Israeli subjects' perceptions did not reflect a skewed or biased perception of media effects but, rather, conformed with what most people would say. It suggests that the stimulus materials may have reflected an anti-Israel bias that all but the most strident opponents of Israel would have to acknowledge. In addition, Vallone, Ross and Lepper assessed only perceptions of the impact that media coverage would exert on neutral viewers' attitude toward Israel. A more complete examination of this facet of the third-person effect hypothesis would include an assessment of beliefs about media effects on public opinion toward both sides of a conflict--i.e., toward the Arab, as well as the Israeli, side.

Several other issues require attention. A comprehensive investigation of ego-involvement and perceptions of media effects would examine the breadth or extent of such perceptions. Do partisans believe that the effects of unfavorable media coverage are confined to the outer limits of the public's attitudes toward their group or do they believe that the effects penetrate even deeper? Specifically, do partisans also perceive that neutral viewers will come to see them as aggressors, while coming to regard their antagonists as innocent victims, worthy of sympathy and ultimately support? Do partisans fear the media's potential to ignite passions against their in-group to such an extent that they perceive that neutral persons will feel more negatively toward (for example) Jews and Arabs after watching a news videotape? In addition, a thorough investigation of ego-involvement and perceptions of media effects would tap into the mental dynamics of partisans' perceptions. For example, it might explore whether partisans believe that third persons will selectively remember events that cast their side in a negative light.

Finally, the accuracy of partisans' perceptions is also deserving of study, even if this is potentially the most difficult issue to resolve satisfactorily. Does ego-involvement imbue individuals with heightened insight into media biases and effects, or does it instead lead to exaggerated and grandiose expectations and fears?

Ego involvement has been defined in a variety of ways (Sherif , Sherif & Nebergall, 1965; Petty & Cacioppo, 1981; Perloff, 1985). Typically, ego-involvement is defined in terms of perceived personal relevance of an

issue or behavior and/or the extremity of the individual's position on the issue (Petty & Cacioppo, 1981). Although it is theoretically possible to separate out personal relevance from extremity of attitude (Perloff, 1985), it is typically very difficult to unconfound these factors. In addition, the perceptions of highly involved partisans are of primary interest here inasmuch as their beliefs can be expected to set the boundary conditions for the third person effect hypothesis. The focus of the present studies, therefore, was on partisan involvement, with highly involved partisans defined as those who have an extreme position on one side of the issue and who also perceive the issue to be highly relevant personally.

Ego-involvement in the Middle East conflict seemed a highly appropriate focus for this investigation. There is little doubt that supporters of the Israeli and Arab sides have strong passions and beliefs about their positions on this issue. In addition, by focusing on partisans in the Middle East conflict, we can build on the earlier findings of Vallone, Ross and Lepper in the various ways discussed above.. The present experiments focused directly on the 1982 war in Lebanon since this aroused considerable controversy in the journalistic community, as well as among Arabs and Jews (Morris, 1982; Shipler, 1986).

Method

Experiment 1

Stimulus Materials. A 13-minute and 30-second videotape was constructed to depict the 1982 war between Israel and the Palestine

Liberation Organization. The videotape was constructed by assembling news footage from CBS, NBC and ABC coverage of the Lebanon war. The materials were selected after an exhaustive search of television coverage of the 1982 war using the Vanderbilt University Television Archives at Vanderbilt University. Literally hours and hours of footage were viewed, and were discarded or selected based on quantitative content analyses of news coverage of the war (Paraschos and Rutherford, 1985) and informal criticism of media coverage (e.g., Alexander, 1982).

Materials were selected in order to ensure that both Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization were portrayed as both aggressors and as victims. Pre-testing helped ensure that there were approximately equal numbers of incidents in which Israel and the PLO were depicted as the initiators and the victims of aggressive acts.

The tape began with coverage of the attempted assassination of Israel's ambassador to Britain, with blame laid by Israeli officials on the PLO. The next scene depicted PLO shelling of Israeli cities, followed by Israeli retaliation and a mention of Israeli censorship of the coverage. The next report described in brief the history of the Lebanon conflict, showing footage of refugees and making note of the PLO's vast quantities of arms cachets and supplies. The next two reports vividly depicted Israeli aggression, showing graphic scenes of civilian casualties and property damage that resulted from Israeli bombing of Beirut.

In contrast, the following two reports focused on PLO aggression: a correspondent reported the controversial statement that PLO fighters live with civilians, implying they deliberately endanger civilian lives.

A second report covered a 1982 attack on a Jewish synagogue in Rome; sources quoted blamed the attack on the PLO. The news videotape continued with a brief display of Israeli bombing of East Beirut, then picked up with Dan Rather's description of a stalemate in the negotiations, moved to a Lebanese family squabble in the midst of the war, and finished with Rather noting that a settlement to allow the PLO to leave West Beirut was forthcoming.

Research Participants. One hundred and two college students participated in the study (34 pro-Israeli, 34 pro-Palestinian and 34 control group subjects with approximately equivalent attitudes toward both Israel and the PLO). Control group subjects were students at Cleveland State University. Pro-Israel and pro-Palestinian subjects were recruited from six Ohio universities: Baldwin-Wallace College, Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland State University, Kent State University, Ohio State University and the University of Akron. Several Pro-Israeli students were also recruited from Cleveland area religious organizations and from a nearby Orthodox Jewish camp. Pro-Israeli participants were in almost all cases Orthodox Jews while Pro-Palestinian partisans were Moslems.

Pro-Palestinian and Israeli partisans were primarily recruited from partisan Arab and Jewish groups at their respective campuses. Pretest measured documented that partisans held extremely positive attitudes toward their side and extremely negative views toward their antagonists. Two 11-point scales tapped attitudes toward Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization, with one signifying a very favorable and 11 a

very unfavorable attitude. Pro-Israeli partisans held very favorable attitudes toward Israel (M=1.32) and highly unfavorable opinions of the PLO (M=10.82). Pro-Palestinian partisans were highly favorable to the PLO (M=1.91) and very unfavorable to Israel (M=10.91). Control group participants were squarely in between (Israel mean = 6.65; PLO mean = 7.26). The differences between all sets of means were statistically significant. Post-test measures also indicated that partisans regularly followed news about the Middle East in the media and believed the Middle East conflict to be highly relevant personally.

Procedure and Survey Questions. In order to disguise the actual purpose of the study, participants were told that they were being asked to view a videotape that was being developed to give college students an idea of the problems of the Middle East. It was noted that their reactions would be helpful in refining the videotape. After watching the news videotape, students answered a series of questions. The first set of questions, adapted from Vallone et al (1985), asked subjects to indicate how fair or unfair the tape was, the extent to which it displayed bias toward Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization, and the percentage of references that were anti-PLO and anti-Israel. The next questions asked them to indicate what impact they believed the tape would exert on neutral individuals' attitudes toward Israel, the PLO, Jews and Arabs. Order of questions was varied so that in certain instances a question concerning Israel appeared first and in other instances the first question referred to the PLO. A typical question appears below:

Suppose a group of neutral viewers watched the tape you have just seen. How positive or negative do you think these neutral viewers would become to Israel after watching the tape? Note: 11 means they'd be very unfavorable to Israel, 1 means they'd become very favorable and 6 means they'd be neither favorable nor unfavorable.

Attributions of hostile intent were next assessed by asking respondents to indicate on an 11-point scale the extent to which they believed that the news coverage reflected suble anti-Arab and anti-Jewish biases on the part of the editors and reporters.

Measures of Perceived Recall. Subjects were also asked to list the facts, incidents or aspects of the videotape that they thought most college students would remember. Room for seven such responses was provided. Two coders subsequently classified these open-ended responses into five categories of perceived recall. Inter-rater agreement was 89 per cent.

The first category, Israel as Aggressor, encompassed beliefs that students would remember that Israel committed aggressive or hostile actions. This category was characterized by the belief that students would remember Israeli aggression. The following illustrate responses that fell into this first category: "The violence of the Israelis against the Lebanese"; "Bombing, bombing, bombing by Israel"; "Destroyed buildings and houses in Lebanon caused by Israel."

The second category, the flip side of Israel as Aggressor was PLO as Victim. This encompassed beliefs that students would recall the PLO or Palestinians as victims, or that they were depicted in a sympathetic manner by the news coverage. This category was typified by the following responses:

"Media tried to make us feel sorry for the Palestinians who were bombed by showing us the pitiful sights"; "Homes demolished, refugee status of Palestinians"; "Arab children who were victimized"; "Arafat with baby (not with guns)."

The third category, PLO as Aggressor, was typified by the beliefs that students would remember PLO aggression. These statements typified this category: "The PLO shot or started shooting Israeli civilians and cities"; "How terrible the PLO must be"; "It all started because some Palestinians (Arabs) shot the Israeli ambassador"; "The violence or inhumanity of PLO members to (as has been reported) seek shelter and safeness among civilians."

Israel as Victim, the fourth category, encompassed beliefs that students would remember Israel as the victim, or that Israel was depicted in a sympathetic way. The following responses were typical: "Northern Israel towns being bombed;" "Shooting of Israeli ambassador"; "Distortion in news coverage using the Israeli position as the standard to which right, wrong and truth must measure up to."

The fifth category, Random Violence, referred to beliefs that students would recall random acts of violence or inhumanity, yet would not attribute this violence to either side. These examples were typical: "Civilian causalties"; "Demolished cities"; "Children and families were broken or dead or severely injured"; "Continuing destruction of West Beirut"; "Pain and suffering of individuals."

Experiment 2

Subjects. Forty-eight students, recruited from upper-level communication classes, participated in a second experiment designed to examine the impact that the news coverage exerted on a group of college student subjects. Twenty-four subjects were randomly assigned to the experimental group (which viewed the 13-minute, 30-second videotape on the Lebanon war) and 24 were assigned to the control group (which watched a 13-minute excerpt from a Public Broadcasting System program on political advertising narrated by Bill Moyers.

Procedure and Questionnaire. The experiment was described as a study of political communications. Subjects first completed a pre-test survey of international communications which assessed subjects' exposure to international news and opinions of several foreign countries. Two questions tapping attitudes toward the PLO and Israel were embedded in the survey. A week after completing the pre-test survey, subjects viewed either the experimental or control videotape. Attitudes toward Israel and the PLO were assessed again. Subjects were also asked four additional questions tapping attitudes toward Arabs and Jews, and perception of Israel and the PLO as victim or aggressor. Finally, students indicated the facts and events that they remembered from the videotape. Their responses were classified using the five-category coding scheme described above.

Results

Given that there were multiple dependent measures and the variables were highly interrelated, a multivariate analysis of variance was

performed (Bochner and Fitzpatrick, 1980; Bray and Maxwell, 1985). Further, the Pillais test of significance was selected since it has proven more robust across a wide range of population distributions than other multivariate statistics (Bray and Maxwell, 1985). The multivariate F was highly significant [F(26,176)=7.98<001]. Accordingly, univariate F tests were performed on each dependent variable. Each of these was highly signfficant, (see Table 1), and Dunca multiple range tests were subsequently performed on the differences between the three group means.

Perceived Bias. Partisan and control group subjects sharply differed in their evaluations of the fairness of the news coverage. Pro-Israeli and Pro-Palestinian subjects believed the news videotape to be substantially less fair than did control group participants. However, as Table 1 illustrates, Palestinian and Israeli partisans did not differ significantly in the extent to which they judged the news coverage to be unfair. The groups also differed significantly in their belief that the videotape displayed a bias against both Israel [F(2,99)=91.68,<001]. Pro-Israel partisans maintained that the news coverage was skewed against Israel and in favor of the PLO, whereas pro-Palestinian subjects contended that the news coverage favored Israel and undermined the PLO. In contrast, control group subjects did not believe that the news coverage was biased against either side of the Middle East conflict.

These divergent perceptions take on even more significance when one examines partisans' estimates of the proportion of the news coverage

that placed their side in a negative light. Pro-Palestinian partisans believed that over 73 per cent of the references made to the PLO were negative. Yet pro-Israel partisans thought that only 28 per cent of the references cast the Palestine Liberation Organization in a negative light. In the same fashion, pro-Israel partisans indicated that 61 per cent of the references placed Israel in a negative light, while Palestinian partisans believed that barely 20 per cent of the references could be regarded as hostile to Israel. Once again, control group subjects did not share these perceptions: they reported that 56 per cent of the references were negative to the PLO and 49 per cent were unfavorable to Israel.

Attributions of Hostile Intent. There were also significant between-group differences in the perception that the news coverage reflected anti-Arab or anti-Jewish biases on the part of broadcast journalists. Predictably, Pro-Palestinian activists were most likely to believe that the news coverage reflected journalists' anti-Arab and pro-Jewish biases, while supporters of Israel were most inclined to conclude that broadcast journalists possessed a bias against Jews and in favor of Arabs.

Perceptions of Media Effects. Partisan and control group subjects diverged sharply when it came to their perceptions of the effects that the news coverage would exert on neutral individuals. As Table 1 shows, Pro-Israel partisans believed that the news coverage would cause neutral persons to become significantly less favorable to Israel and significantly more favorable to the PLO than did pro-Palestinian partisans or control group participants. In the same fashion, pro-PLO partisans were

more likely than pro-Israel partisans and control group subjects to believe that neutral viewers would feel more positively toward Israel and more negatively toward the PLO after watching the news coverage. In addition, pro-PLO activists believed that the news coverage would cause neutral individuals to regard the PLO as an aggressor and Israel as a victim to a far greater extent than did the other two groups of subjects. In precisely the same fashion, pro-Israel partisans were most likely to contend that neutral individuals would rate Israel as the aggressor and the PLO as a victim after viewing the 13-minute news videotape.

Similar, although somewhat weaker results were obtained on four questions that asked respondents to judge the impact that the news coverage would exert on a separate group of college students. These questions, although seemingly repetitive of the earlier questions, were included in order to compare as precisely as possible partisans' beliefs about the news coverage's impact with the effects that the news coverage actually exerted on a group of college students studied at another point in time (see Study 2). The results for perceptions of the news coverage's impact on attitudes toward Israel and toward Jews paralleled the findings reported above. Pro-Israel partisans were most inclined to believe that students who watched the news coverage would become less favorable toward both Israel and Jews. Supporters of the Palestine Liberation Organization, in contrast, were most inclined to believe that the news coverage would cause students to become more favorable to Israel and toward Jews.

However, pro-Palestinian partisans did not perceive that the news coverage would increase antipathy toward the PLO or Arabs. Post-hoc tests confirmed that the main effect for these latter items was due to pro-Israeli partisans' belief that the news videotape would cause students to evaluate the PLO and Arabs more favorably.

Perceptions of Students' Recall. What did ego-involved partisans believe that students would remember from the news coverage? In order to answer this question, a multivariate analysis of covariance test was performed on subjects' scores on the five categories of perceived recall, controlling for the total number of responses subjects provided. The multivariate analysis yielded significant results [$F(14,184)=11.34, p<.001$]. Univariate ANCOVAS were then performed on each of the five dependent variables. Each of these Fs were also significant (see Table 2). Arc sin transformations were performed on Israel as aggressor and PLO as victim scores since these distributions were skewed (Winer, 1971).

As Table 2 shows, Israeli partisans believed that students would remember more events that cast Israel as the aggressor than did Palestinian or control group subjects. Pro-Israel subjects also contended that students would remember more incidents that depicted the PLO as a victim than the other two groups of subjects. In a similar vein, pro-Palestinian activists also believed that students would remember more events that cast the PLO as an aggressor and Israel as a victim than did their pro-Israel or control group counterparts.

The results also indicated that control group subjects diverged significantly from both pro-Israel and pro-Palestinian partisans in recall

of random violence (Category 5). Subjects in the control group indicated that students would remember more incidents of random violence than did either group of partisan subjects. In other words, control group subjects believed that students would primarily recall incidents that depicted the violence and inhumanity of war in the Middle East--incidents that they did not attribute to either Israel or the PLO.

Findings from Experiment 2: Effects of the News Coverage

The second experiment investigated the effects that the news coverage exerted on a separate group of college students. In order to assess the effects that the news coverage exerted on attitudes toward the PLO and Israel, a one-way analysis of covariance was performed on post-test attitudes toward the PLO and Israel, controlling for pre-test attitudes. The results indicated that the news coverage did not change attitudes toward either Israel [$F=(1,45)=1.72$, n.s.] or the Palestine Liberation Organization [$F(1,45)=.004$, n.s.] The results of four t-tests indicated that subjects who viewed the news coverage did not differ from control group subjects in their attitudes toward Arabs and Jews, or in their perception of the extent to which Israel and the PLO was the aggressor or victim in the Middle East conflict ($ps<.50$).

Finally, what did students actually remember from the news videotape? A one-way within subjects analysis of covariance was performed on the facts that subjects recalled from the videotape, controlling for total facts recalled. The five categories of recall described above

were treated as five levels of a within subjects variable. The analysis yielded a significant main effect, [$F(1,22)=39.72, p<.001$], and Duncan post-hoc tests clarified the nature of this effect. The events that students recalled most frequently fell into the category of Random Violence. In other words, they primarily remembered events that depicted the violence and inhumanity of the war in Lebanon--but they did not identify the violence with either side of the conflict.

Discussion

The results demonstrate that ego-involvement exerts strong and pervasive effects on perceptions of media effects. The study's findings are consistent with those of Vallone, Ross and Lepper (1985)--and they extend these researchers' findings in several key ways. As we have seen, ego-involved partisans not only believe that controversial news coverage will sway public opinion against their side; they also perceive that media reports will cause third persons to become more favorable toward their antagonists. Ego-involvement also influences other components of individuals' perceptions of news media effects.

Ego-involved partisans believed that neutral individuals would come to see their side as the aggressor and their antagonists as the victim. Partisan subjects also believed that viewers would feel more positively toward the out-group's ethnic identity. Personal involvement even led to biased perceptions of what third persons would remember from the news coverage--partisans believed that viewers would primarily recall facts that cast their side as the aggressor and their antagonists as the

victim. In contrast to these perceptions, the second experiment demonstrated that the news coverage did not change attitudes toward Israel or the PLO. Furthermore, viewers remembered primarily random incidents of violence and inhumanity--incidents that they did not associate with either the PLO or to Israel.

Although partisans on both sides regarded the news coverage as biased and contended that it would exert powerful effects on third persons' attitudes, the effects were stronger in several cases for pro-Israel than for pro-Palestinian partisans. This may have been due to the fact that the news coverage focused primarily on the 1982 war in Lebanon--a war dominated by Israel's often-controversial military activities (i.e., the Israeli army's crossing the Lebanon border and regular bombing of Beirut). Given this focus, it becomes all the more intriguing that Palestinian partisans vehemently believed that the news coverage reflected a hostile bias against their side.

Explanations and Processes. The present results do not support the predictions made by the simple projection thesis. If this alternative hypothesis were correct, partisan subjects would have projected their own interpretations onto neutral individuals. For example, pro-Israeli partisans should have egocentrically concluded that viewers would share their perception that the news coverage displayed a bias against Israel and in favor of the PLO. In a similar fashion, the simple projection thesis would predict that partisans would project their views of how the news coverage influenced them onto neutral viewers. We can only speculate as to how partisans reacted to the news videotape since perceptions of its

impact on their own attitudes were not assessed. Partisans' remarks during an extensive post-test interview and their answers to several open-ended questions, suggest that if anything, the news coverage strengthened their beliefs. Thus, if the simple projection thesis were correct, one would expect that partisans might assume that viewers would "come to the only reasonable conclusion about the facts" --and therefore expect neutral persons to develop a more favorable attitude toward their side of the conflict. Of course, the results indicated that partisans developed a completely opposite set of expectations.

Why did partisans come to expect that the news coverage would sway public opinion against their side? One possible interpretation is based on demand characteristics. According to this view, partisans guessed the research hypothesis and proceeded to comply with it. However, it strains credulity to argue that partisans were able to differentiate between the simple projection and the hostile media bias hypotheses. It is difficult to imagine that partisans recognized that one purpose of the experiment was to examine whether they projected their own beliefs about the news coverage onto the public or instead contended that the coverage would sway public opinion against their side. Indeed, there was no indication from either the post-experimental debriefing or from responses to several open-ended questions that partisans were aware of the two competing hypotheses.

A more plausible interpretation is that ego involvement causes

partisans to develop perceptual biases which in turn lead to heightened beliefs about media effects. Supplementary analyses indicated that, after partisan involvement had been entered into a hierarchical regression equation, perception of news media bias and attribution of hostile intent to broadcast journalists accounted for significant variance in beliefs about the effects of the Middle East news coverage.

This suggests that there are two fundamentally different mechanisms that underlie partisans' perceptions of third person effects. The first is a perception of news media bias, the second a set of beliefs about the nature of the viewing audience. As Vallone, Ross and Lepper documented, perception of news media bias may itself have two components: a negative evaluation of the fairness or objectivity of the news, and a tendency to "see" or "recollect" different materials from the newscast. Similarly, the present study found that partisans not only believed that the news coverage was unfair; they disagreed more fundamentally about the nature of the facts themselves. Supporters of Israel believed that over 60 per cent of the references were negative to Israe, while Palestinian partisans perceived that over 70 per cent of the references were against the PLO. To Israeli supporters, it was a fact that Palestinian fighters lived with civilians, deliberately jeopardizing civilians' lives. To supporters of the Palestine Liberation Organization, the facts were otherwise--most civilians welcomed the PLO into their communities as an alternative to the despised Israelis.

Partisans' beliefs about the viewing audience also seem to underlie their perceptions of media effects. In effect, when second persons are ego involved in the material that the media are covering, they appear to be particularly inclined to assume that the audience is impressionable and susceptible to media effects. One reason for this, as the present findings suggest, lies in the nature of partisans' inferences concerning the intent of broadcast journalists--the first persons who transmitted the message. As Mutz (1987) notes, based on Worth and Gross's (1984) theory of symbolic strategies, second persons may believe that they alone recognize the sender's intentions--thus, while they understand that news media reports are akin to propaganda, third persons, lacking their sophistication, may regard the news as information that is highly fair, credible and objective.

The foregoing discussion suggests that there is a certain logic to partisans' conclusions about news media effects. Given their conviction that media reports are biased and their belief that the audience is impressionable (and perhaps even hostile to their side), it is reasonable to conclude that the audience will become less favorable to their side after viewing the news coverage. Furthermore, depending on their view of the audience, partisans may be either hypodermic needle theorists who believe in all-powerful media effects, or they may function as limited effects theorists who believe that news media content strengthens and reinforces the audience's pre-existing negative attitudes.

Actual Effects. As the second experiment demonstrated, the news

coverage did not significantly change students' attitudes toward either Israel or the PLO. These findings are in line with what control group subjects predicted: they believed that the news videotape would not appreciably influence students' attitudes or beliefs about the Middle East. Unfortunately, this finding can be interpreted in two different ways, raising the familiar and now-classical problems in research on the accuracy of social perceptions (McLeod and Chaffee,1973). It is possible that control group subjects correctly predicted the impact of the news coverage, or it can be argued that they projected their own perceptions of the news coverage onto others. The present study does not allow us any way to determine which of these interpretations is correct.

If there is some ambiguity about the meaning of control group subjects' predictions, there is less uncertainty about the nature of partisans' expectations about the news coverage. When one compares partisans' expectations about the effects of the news coverage with the null findings obtained in the second experiment, one is left with the conclusion that partisans tended to magnify the negative impact that the news coverage would exert on viewers' attitudes. This conclusion is tempered somewhat when one remembers that pro-Palestinian subjects did not believe that the news videotape would influence attitudes toward Arabs or the PLO. On the other hand, pro-Palestinian partisans did believe that the news coverage would cause students to become more favorable to Israel and toward Jews, and they contended that neutral

viewers would view the PLO less favorably than did other subjects. The pattern of partisans' expectations of news media effects, therefore, is at some variance with the actual effects that the news videotape exerted.

If the results of the second experiment might surprise partisans, they should come as little or no surprise to mass communication researchers and scholars of public opinion. There is general agreement that political attitudes are relatively difficult to change, particularly in a one-shot communication experiment (Becker, McCombs and McLeod, 1975). In a similar vein, the findings concerning students' recall of the news is quite compatible with research on news comprehension (Robinson and Levy, 1986). As Table 3 shows, subjects were most likely to recall random incidents of violence and inhumanity--incidents that they did not attribute to either Israel or the PLO. Although these findings were at variance with partisans' beliefs that subjects would remember violent incidents that cast their side as the aggressor, they are remarkably consistent with Robinson and Levy's general conclusions about comprehension of the news. According to this line of research, when respondents are not personally involved in the issues covered in the nightly news, they frequently focus on only the most vivid and graphic aspects of what is presented. Furthermore, individuals process the news in terms of their prevailing schema, guided perhaps by the notion that the Mideast is a crazy place that defies rational analysis, these students may have naturally remembered the violent events that reinforced that idea. The

task of placing these events in a more orderly,even ideologically-based,context was understandably difficult for all but the most proficient, and--in this case--partisan participants.

In the real world, the issue of the accuracy of partisans' perceptions is even more complex. This is illustrated by the controversy that surrounded the media's coverage of the 1982 war in Lebanon. In 1982, pro-Israeli partisans frequently argued that media coverage of the Lebanon war was heavily biased against Israel and would permanently tarnish Americans' attitudes toward Israel (see Alexander, 1982). Empirical studies of media content and changes in public opinion provide somewhat mixed support for their claims.

In a content analysis of television news coverage of the war, Paraschos and Rutherford (1985) found that over three-fourths of reporters' assertions were judged to be neutral. However, of the non-neutral statements, more were anti-Israel than anti-PLO. This provides partial support for pro-Israeli critics' claims. Evidence concerning changes in public opinion toward Israel is equally mixed. In a study of American public opinion toward the Arab-Israeli conflict, Gilboa (1987) reported that although public opinion toward Israel dropped in the six month period that followed the war, it had returned to its pre-war levels by February 1983.

Thus, if pro-Israeli partisans' actual charges of bias lend real-world credence to the present findings, they also illustrate that the accuracy question is more complex than frequently assumed. The above studies suggest that it is too facile to conclude that ego-involvement inevitably produces distorted and fanciful expectations about media

content and effects. Under some conditions involvement may produce keen insights about media content. Yet it also may lead to somewhat exaggerated fears about media effects. The interesting question is, of course, when involvement leads to heightened insight about media and public opinion and when it is associated with fears that have little basis in external reality.

Impact on Communication Behavior. Although it is intriguing to explore how involvement influences perceptions of media effects, it is also important to document the impact that such perceptions can exert on behavior. A variety of anecdotal examples suggest that the perception of media effects is the starting point for various lobbying campaigns and activities that inevitably fuel public debate. For example, driven by their belief that news media coverage of the 1982 war in Lebanon was biased and unfair, American Jewish activists lobbied the news media (Morris, 1982). They wrote to the editor of leading newspapers, authored op ed criticisms of news media coverage, and in some cases met with leading American journalists to press their case. Similar cases involving other partisan groups abound--including peace activists' verbal protests against ABC's "Amerika" series during the winter of 1987. From a theoretical perspective, these public responses to the news media are interesting--for they suggest an apparent exception to the spiral of silence theory (Noelle-Neuman, 1984). In the present context, this theory would seem to predict that partisans would be reluctant to speak out publicly,

given the reasonable presumption that they believe that their position is in the minority. Perhaps when individuals are highly ego-involved in a cause and perceive that they have the ability and power to influence public opinion, their perceptions of media effects may intensify, rather than silence their participation in public debates.

Future Research Directions. These findings suggest several interesting avenues for research on ego-involvement and the third person effect. It would be useful to determine when ego-involved second persons will project their own views onto the audience and when they will assume that third persons will become more hostile toward their side. In this vein, Gunther and Lasorsa's (1986) survey results suggest that perceptions of hostile media bias will be found only among individuals at the extreme end of the personal involvement continuum. On the other hand, one might suggest that partisans should assume that the audience shares their perspective when media programs present the issues in an even-handed manner and when partisans perceive the audience to be less hostile toward their side. Studies might also attempt to explore other contexts in which ego-involvement might shape perceptions of media effects. Religion, sports and education might be interesting contexts in which to explore these issues. Finally, it would be useful to examine how various partisan publics perceive communication effects. The coorientation model (McLeod and Chaffee, 1973), long out of fashion in communication research, may provide an appropriate starting point.

Studies of how journalists, policy-makers, lobbyists and the public perceive public opinion and the media may shed light on the perceptual differences that frequently separate these groups.

Table 1
Mean Responses of Partisan and Control Group Subjects to Items Concerning News Media Coverage of 1982 War in Lebanon

Question	Subject Group		
	Pro-Israel	Pro-Palest.	Control
1. Perceived Fairness of News Coverage [F(2,99)= 7.29] *	4.41	3.91	6.03
2. Belief News is Negative to Israel [F(2,99)=91.68]	8.12	2.59	6.00
3. Belief News is Negative to PLO [F(2,99)=51.24]	4.50	9.32	6.85
4. Percentage of News Negative to PLO [F(2,99)=36.79]	28.66	73.53	56.15
5. Percentage of News Negative to Israel [F(2,99)=39.48]	61.00	20.15	49.03
6. Attribution of Anti-Jewish Sentiments to Editors [F(2,99)=44.53]	3.89	9.40	5.57
7. Attribution of Anti-Arab Sentiments to Editors [F(2,99)=22.95]	8.08	4.49	5.58
8. Perceived Impact on Neutral Persons' Attitude toward Israel [F(2,99)=22.30]	8.41	4.68	6.65
9. Perceived Impact on Neutral Persons' Attitude toward PLO [F(2,99)=23.72]	4.94	8.50	7.35
10. Perception of Neutrals' Rating of PLO as Aggressor [F(2,99)=27.09]	4.35	8.62	6.91
11. Perception of Neutrals' Rating of Israel as Aggressor [F(2,99)=31.72]	8.97	4.21	6.00

Table 1 cont'd

Question	Subject Group		
	Pro-Israel	Pro-Palest.	Control
12. Perception Students will Change Attitude Toward Israel [F(2,99)=12.14]	7.94	5.38	6.26
13. Perception Students Will Change Attitude Toward PLO [F(2,99)=14.00]	5.15	7.06	7.59
14. Perception Students will Change Attitude Toward Arabs [F(2,99)=23.07]	4.71	7.50	7.03
15. Perception Students Will Change Attitude Toward Jews [F(2,99)=20.97]	7.44	4.47	5.88

* All Fs are significant at the .001 level.

Note: For question 1, pro-Israel and pro-Palestinian groups differ significantly from control group at.01 level, but not from each other. For questions 2 through 4, all groups differ significantly from each other at .01 level. For question 5, all groups differ significantly at .05 level. On question 6-9 groups differ significantly at .01 level; for question 9 groups differ significantly at .05 level. For questions 10-12 all groups differ significantly at .01 level. On questions 13-14, pro-Israeli group differs from other two at .01 level; they do not differ significantly from each other. For question 15, groups differ significantly from each other at .01 level.

1. 1 is not at all fair; 11 very fair.
2. 1 is biased in favor of Israel; 11 is biased against Israel.
3. 1 is biased in favor of PLO; 11 is biased against PLO.
4. The higher the number, the more negative to PLO.
5. The higher the number, the more negative to Israel.
6. The lower the number, the more anti-Jewish sentiment.
7. The lower the number, the more anti-Arab sentiment.
8. 1 means very favorable to Israel; 11 very unfavorable.
9. 1 means very favorable to PLO; 11 very unfavorable.
10. 1 means PLO is seen as victim, 11 as an aggressor.
11. 1 means Israel is seen as victim, 11 as an aggressor.
12. 1 means very favorable to Israel; 11 very unfavorable.
13. 1 is very favorable to PLO; 11 is very unfavorable.
14. 1 is very favorable to Arabs, 11 very unfavorable.
15. 1 means very favorable to Jews, 11 very unfavorable.

Table 2
Mean Responses of Partisan and Control Group Subjects Concerning Their Beliefs as to what Students will Remember from Middle East News Coverage

Item and Illustrative Response	Subject Group		
	Pro-Israel	Pro-Palest.	Control
1. Israel as Aggressor "Bombing, bombing, bombing by Israel" [F(2,84)=4.84] *	.83	.31	.32
2. PLO as Victim "Homes demolished, refugee status of Palestinians" [F(2,92)=8.74]	.79	.26	.18
3. PLO as Aggressor "The PLO started shooting Israeli civilians and cities" [F(2,98)=14.39]	.11	1.04	.31
4. Israel as Victim "Northern Israel towns being bombed" [F(2,98)=19.46]	.32	1.31	.25
5. Random Violence "Continuing destruction of West Beirut" [F(2,98)=6.74]	.83	.54	1.36

* F For item 1 is significant at the .01 level.
F For items 2-5 are significant at the .005 levels.

Note: On items 1 and 2, pro-Israel group is significantly different from pro-Palestinian and control at .01 level. On items 3 and 4, pro-Palestinian group is significantly different from pro-Israeli group at .01 level. On item 5, control group is significantly different from Palestinian group at .01 level and from Israeli group at .05 level.

The higher the number, the greater the number of such beliefs subjects have.

Table 3
What Students Actually Remembered from News Coverage of the Middle East

Type of Fact	Mean Number Recalled
1. Israel as Aggressor	.58
2. PLO as Victim	.13
3. PLO as Aggressor	.38
4. Israel as Victim	.42
5. Random Violence	1.29

Note: Fact 5 differs significantly from all others at .01 level. Fact 1 differs from Fact 2 at .05 level.

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